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Video Photography**

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Interpretive Center
At the Kam Wah Chung Museum**

Carolyn Micnhimer -CM
Janet Worthington -JW
Gary Worthington -GW

JW: Carolyn, when were you first associated with the Kam Wah Chung company store and Museum?

CM: Twenty-six years ago...a long time ago, really...to remember the exact date...twenty-six years ago.

JW: And, how did that come about? How did you become associated with Kam Wah Chung?

CM: Actually, they put an add in the newspaper and my husband was having difficulties working and I told him I was going to apply for the job as Museum Curator...and...ah...I got in touch with Gordon Glass, because his name was mentioned along with the City and I came up and talked with them and...ah...I had never been in a Museum, and I talked with them about what the person would have to do. He explained it to me and said, do you think you could do it, and I said, I could try, and so I tried.

JW: Very good, very good. Tell us please about Kam Wah Chung, how the restoration was done and how the Museum was opened...when you went to work was the Museum...had it already been opened?

CM: Yes, yes, it had just opened, in other words, they had...they had gone through the building...ah...did restoration...what they needed to do to make it presentable for people to come in and look at it, also they had lighting and things that were needed which weren't in the building originally, because it is a dark building...ah...and...so, they sort of were kind of testing it with somebody to talk in it, basically. Then, of course, working for the City...the City people had people building it up for advertisements and things, you know, to open. I did become acquainted with other people who had worked there.

Basically, the back room wasn't quite finished yet and they were still working on that, but the rest of the building was like it is now.

JW: Oh, and what year was this do you...was this—

CM: Actually, ah...

JW: Twenty-six years ago...so...it was '70'?

CM: Yeah, about that...1970.

GW: Twenty-six years ago would be 1980.

CM: I think 1978 was when I talked to Gordon Glass the first time, something like that...was talking with him...of course...the City of John Day had to hire me. They were the people hiring. Not living in the City limits, I had to go meet the City people too.

JW: I see.

CM: So, actually, this is the way it turned out to be...ah...as far as I know...ah...would have to go back in my papers to remember the names of all the people. I know I should probably remember...but...basically my husband working in the area, he knew a lot of the men and people that had work down...so...

JW: Oh, he did?

CM: Actually, he knew them by name, so when I went home I'd mention and he'd...oh, yeah, so and so's a good carpenter he's working...so, basically it was just a matter of getting the job and then becoming acquainted with the whole thing. Of course, Gordon Glass was very helpful, because he was the man that put the building together, so to speak. He was the one, through the City, worked with getting other people become involved with it...and...ah...so I put my trust in Gordon Glass. He would tell me the things I should know and I'm still saying the exact same things, so I guess their good. [Both laugh]

JW: You mentioned some of the construction that went on, what kinds of stages did the Museum go through to become what it is today? What did they do to it?

CM: Basically, our building was...ah...pretty much the same the way it was. I can't remember what the...ah...admission was, if there was an admission the very first period it opened. They sort of...kind of...had a grand opening like for local people.

JW: They did?

CM: Well, not a big advertisement one, but they invited people to come down, see what was done, type of deal, because a lot of people in the County didn't even realize it was

being restored, so consequently, I believe Gordon and the City felt like we got to introduce it, that's the word I use, and then, of course, they introduced me too. I got the introduction to the building along with the people...ah...which helped me a lot, because I had knew some of the people since I had moved here and today I still know some of the people that were involved in it.

JW: Did they move all of the objects out of the Museum to do the restoration if they had to do carpentry work and electrical—

CM: I wasn't really involved in that part of it, but, basically in seeing some pictures I would say...basically...to take up the floors you had to move stuff out...ah just where they stored it...ah...I do know Gordon...ah...had a garage...you know...he had a large garage and I do know some of that was stored in his place of business, I believe in boxes until they could get the floor torn up...stuff like that. Of course, if you're going to tear the floor up the whole building has to...you know...be sorta...kinda...either moved to one room or the other. I believe a lot of things were put back in the back room or the room where the shrine and the store are now, because that was the largest room...and...so...ah...the fact that the work went on systematically...what they worked on...the floor...the building itself...the roof had to be fixed, things like that. I think they were more concerned with preserving all the artifacts somehow...boxing them up...putting them down City Hall in their lower...ya know...course, City Hall was up in town then, it wasn't where it is now, and I believe, the Fire Station was there, and actually, they had one empty building next to City Hall, and that would be across the street where Gordon's garage was. I think, perhaps, a lot of the stuff would have been brought up there very easily, because it is just a couple of blocks from the Kam Wah Chung. That's my assumption on it, having not been involved in that part of it, but I am sure that it was very carefully handled. As far as I know, the things are in the room that they were originally in. They had a Kam Wah Chung board working with Gordon, local people. As far as I know, their notes were pretty well kept as to what went on. I've known some of the lady's who were on the board, still know some of them. So, I think, perhaps everybody worked together on what happened to the contents in the building when they were doing the restoration work.

JW: So, what you think is a portion of this went to Gordon's garage and to these other buildings that were close at hand, so everything could be in sort of the same—

CM: Well, the thing is, you couldn't take all the floor up at one time. Actually, the entrance room that we come in, those boards were taken up...saved...the square nails taken out. They're all in a box upstairs or they were upstairs. Then they used regular nails to put the old floor boards down in the same nail holes and I don't think anybody realizes that when they walk on the building.

JW: I didn't know that.

CM: So, you see, they were very careful on restoring it like it was. Some of the boards by the heating stoves, those were...ah...I don't want to use the word new, because they

went up Canyon City, they tell me, found old buildings that were torn apart and got old boards to put down on the floor, so they resembled all the old boards, but the wide boards are different ones. That is what they told me about the floors and things.

JW: The floor in the new section that's on the other side of the kitchen, that floor is all brand new?

CM: Yeah, actually, the back room, the last room they built...that was built on last, that one is new flooring. The other ones on the downstairs are all the old boards, they tell me. I felt like that was a labor of love. I mean that took a lot of work taking those square nails out and using the same nail holes.

JW: Yes, yes, absolutely and positively. Do you think that as things were moved, were there photographs taken of each one of the objects as they were moved?

CM: I don't believe so. I don't believe we had the photography that you have today. I can remember seeing a few old pictures of things, but not, basically all of it, no.

JW: Not all of it?

CM: We just didn't. I think time wise was the thing that they were anxious to get it put back like it should be and open to the public.

JW: I see.

CM: Of course, that took almost ten years, they told me, before it opened to the public from the time they started and then Gordon was also interested in getting...ah...Chinese, not necessarily Chinese opinion, but opinion of people who knew about Chinese things, so that we would have it as close to Chinese as we could have it.

JW: Good.

CM: Mixed with the American things that were in the building.

JW: What about the artifacts, lets talk about the things that have come back and some of the things that have been given to the Museum over the years. Have people brought things back—

CM: Actually, in the north room we have one glass case and I was told when I started working that we do not accept Chinese things just to have Chinese.

JW: Uh-huh.

CM: It had to have a connection with the building. Consequently, all those things, most all of them I'll say, because there has been some, which I did not add to it...ah...but most of them, actually...ah...had a connection, either Doc Hay used them for medicine in their

home and they saved the bowl and brought the bowl back and the lady brought the story back of what Doc Hay used it for...ah...the slippers were given to them as a Christmas present from Lung On and Doc Hay. The robe there...that lady...she worked for the Forest Service office. She typed two letters up for Lung On and every very time he saw her he gave her the robe for doing the two letters. Every time he saw her he gave her silk stockings, he gave her candy and finally said, that's it...that's it, I only did two letters. [Both laugh] So you see, it was something people appreciated doing and yet the Chinese were more than appreciative for things that were done for them. Those are the type of things in that case. The stories, I don't know them all, but generally, we have a story to go with them and I made out cards for all of them, so there was a card who knew who donated it, and basically, when.

JW: That's wonderful. Over the years, now you've been giving tours for twenty-six, twenty-seven years?

CM: Twenty-six. Uh-huh.

JW: Twenty-six years. Over the years, have you...how have you changed the things that you tell people...the tour...have you learned new facts that have somewhat changed some of the things that you have talked about?

CM: Actually, the building itself, you mean, within the building?

JW: Right and what you show people and what you talk about.

CM: Other than the basic needs of having something fixed, you know...or...ah...they did...ah...have...ah...things outside the building, like the grass being planted, the rocks close to the building and they had big rocks and those weren't very good, because...ah...they weren't well walked on, so having finer gravel put in for people to walk...and then...watering the stuff in the park, they would be getting water on the building and that had to have a thing...Gordon had to talk to them and, of course, I kept note of when the water was on the building...tap the fellow on the park...you gotta move the sprinklers. The parks people did a great job on replanting the plants in front of the building, those trees and things. They, in fact, I have the papers on that, they asked permission to do that part, to go with our building, which was a very nice thing to do, otherwise, it was just an open lot, so to speak. I feel like everybody was helpful as far as the City in getting the building so that it looked well and people could stand outside and say, I wonder what's in there. That basically, I think, is what it was.

JW: What groups have come over the years to tour the Museum? Have you had some unique groups of people who have come to see the Museum?

CM: Well, we did have the one Chinese group from China and I remember that one...ah...sitting outside with some of them when they were taking pictures...inside with some of them. We were sitting on the lawns out there looking across the river up on the hill and the man said to me, he said, you know this is like China at home.

JW: Oh really!

CM: I said, what? He said, Yeah, we look across...there was six of them...and he said, we sit out here and we automatically start talking about home, China. Not that it was exactly the same, but the atmosphere gave them that they were at home with China and then looking over to a stone building, which still are in certain parts of China stone buildings, and he said, the combination of it all made them ready to go back home.

JW: Oh, that's neat.

CM: I thought that was rather interesting, because these were Chinese...was only one of them that really spoke the American language...ah...they talk Chinese among themselves a mile a minute, but I didn't understand it all. [Both laugh] I thought that was interesting, because it was a thing that they just sat and did. Nobody prompted them. Nobody said anything to them. They just sat there and talked with me about China.

JW: What are the most common responses that people have when they go through the Museum? What do they say to you about the Museum? How do they—

CM: The most common one, are you sure all these things were in the building? [Both laugh] That one is always the one and then you'll say, yes, they were all in the building...the building was locked up how many years? You know, it's unbelievable and actually, generally when you say they've all been...and they've gone through the whole building...heard the tour...and their talking about it...the last thing they'll say, was this in the building, and they'll point to something, so, you know, it's a hard thing for people, I think, and then they go back and tell somebody else...ah...and generally, the visitors that come, because they told them...was this all in the building? You know...unbelievable type of fact...I think we accept it more today...ah...you know...it's still an unbelievable deal that the building could've survived like it did and yet still have all of China in it and...ah...all the years it's been open still the same.

JW: Speaking of survival...um...there's been some stories that there were some children that got into the Museum while it was closed up? Have you talked to any of those people who may be now older who said, oh yes, I came in here when it was locked up?

CM: Yeah, actually, I had two sets of two men; I'll put it that way. The one man was by himself and when he came in there was nobody else. I gave him the tour and we came into the north room...not the north room...the west...east room...I'm sorry...ah...the big room and he said to me, actually...um..."You know, did you ever hear the story about the boys that broke into the building?" I said, "Well...yeah" I said, "I've heard one story. Did you mean actually break the building?" He said, "No, we got in the building." I said, "Well, I've heard about the one in the kitchen." He said, "That's the one." He said, "I was the boy that came in here." I said, "Oh, why don't you tell me the story. I could almost tell you what happened, but why don't you tell me?" He said, "There was three of us and we heard there were fireworks, we knew there were fireworks in the building." Basically, he said, "The stone on the bottom part of the kitchen was loose and it could be

moved out,” and he said, “I was the smallest one that could fit through the opening, so I was elected to go in and find fireworks for us.” I just shook my head, yes. He said, “I did, I fit through the hole.” And he got up and he stood, at that time the furniture was arranged a little bit different in the building, he said, “I stood up and the light from that opening was on the floor in the kitchen,” he said “I could walk in it and I could see the light on the floor,” and he said “I knew I had to go into the main room where the fireworks were,” and, so, he said, “I actually stopped and it was dark in there” and he said, “I took one step” and he said, “yeah, it felt like floor boards under my feet. I took a second step and something crinkled underneath my foot. I took a third step and something soft underneath my foot. I decided there were no fireworks in that building. I turned around and went out and told the kids, no fireworks in there.” So, I said to him, this is a grown man that I said it to, “Do you know what they found where you said, there was something soft? A dead cat.” And that was the end of it. Basically, he was very...ah...in other words he shared what happened. I thought I had heard they had come in, but I hadn’t heard the story and the other one was three boys...was at night time and the building was dark, but the big door was open and the screen door wasn’t locked, and they had heard that Doc Hay had money under his bed. They decided if nobody was in there they would go look under Doc Hay’s bed. They pushed the screen door and it made a little noise with it, but nobody came or anything, so they went in, and once again it was the boy...ah...that did the deal...that was telling me...a grown man telling me the story, and he said, “we went over where we new where Doc Hay’s bedroom was and we knew that the money would be under his bed.” “So the two fellows that were with me were bigger fellows, but I was the smaller one and it was elected to me to go look under Doc Hay’s bed to see where the money was. I put a couple of steps in to the room and the other two fellas stood on the outside of the doorway there right in the other room.” He said, “Unbeknown to us, Doc hay was in the bed. Doc Hay picked up his clever and flung it across the room and just missed my head. We got out of there so fast. We never looked back and we never went near the Kam Wah Chung building again, because we thought Doc Hay could identify us...even seeing us in the dark.” Those two stories always stayed with me. It wasn’t the thing that the kids were breaking in; it was just curiosity type things. Those two stories have always remained with me and I repeat them every once in a while for people.

JW: I’m sure they enjoy them.

CM: It was the fact that the man came back and told me the boys story that I thought was nice.

JW: What kind of contributions do you feel the Chinese have made to this area?

CM: The Chinese in Portland have been very acceptable for what we have in the Kam Wah Chung. They’ve also shared their knowledge...Chinese people coming from different parts of Portland and places...coming and talking to us about things in the Museum. There’s been Chinese from California. Chinese herbalist and people like that are amazed at what they find there for Doc Hay’s herbal room for being so far back in time and yet the Chinese herbalist are way beyond the amount of herbs that Doc Hay had

today. But there...I think...ah...it's sorta kinda hard for people to accept Chinese in our American locality and staying here and keeping up with all the things Chinese, because Doc Hay and lung on did keep up all Chinese things in that building. When these people come in and see the shrine and the other things and then see the Chinese writing on the wall that they can translate that we don't necessarily have translated, things like that, they say, yeah it's Chinese, it's Chinese, in other words, we are not trying to portray something that isn't what it original was. I think that's the fact that they find amazing. So many times everybody wants to put something else into it and we have had large amounts of Chinese from different places come and then even the Chinese men who came to visit that time from China and they would get in there and just shake their head to sorta, kinda say, almost like home...almost like home. The only thing lacking would be any Chinese families or wives in the area, but their all...their all astonished that we have preserved it...Chinese...that we haven't interacted with the American and Chinese...strictly is Chinese. We Americans have to do the talking and things and visit, but more and more people are coming from different places Chinese...ah...San Francisco, places like that...not just two, but four or five of them at one time. So...actually, I believe that the fact that it is Chinese history to begin with...it will always be Chinese history and through the years it will become an important part of the Chinese history itself in China.

JW: Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences?

CM: Pardon?

JW: Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences?

CM: It's just a great place to work. I feel like I've been honored, because I never knew anything about Chinese. We only had one girl in school that was Chinese and her father owned the biggest restaurant that we ever had down on Brooklyn, where I was born, and actually she would invite us to the restaurant Friday after school to do homework and the little Chinese man waiter would come and bring us tea and cookies and that was my Chinese touch with China before I even got the job and so I've come a long way.

JW: Well, we want to thank you so much for taking time to share your experiences with us—

CM: I'm glad to be on record and I'm sure it will mean a lot to a lot of people.

JW: Thank you very much.

GW: End of interview.